

CHINA'S COMMUNES CHILD WORKERS IN SOVIET BLOC

January 1959

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The Communist world is today engaged in an ideological tug-of-war brought about by the institution of communes in China. This step will seriously affect the daily lives of millions of workers in the Russian satellites of Eastern Europe.

Because of their cultural background, European nations would only submit to a radical social change like that inflicted by Mao Tse-tung upon his people with extreme reluctance, possibly calling for the use of force of arms.

The Russians are, therefore, faced with a thorny problem of policy regarding the satellites. It is a question of how to reconcile the change in China and the basic precepts of pure Communism with the realities of social life in Europe. All this will certainly prove to have far-reaching effects on these peoples since it cannot be denied that the institution of the communes--they are in reality super-collectives--has placed Peking in the vanguard of communistic practice and gives the appearance that the purest form of Marxism now comes from China and not Russia.

This places Khrushchey in a difficult position, for his political standing in Russia is not so strong that he can afford to allow it to appear that the neophyte Chinese Communists are stealing his ideological thunder.

The introduction of the communes has caused more than a ripple of apprehension in Czechoslovakia and East Germany as the people wonder whether they, like the Chinese, will see their traditional family life annihilated and find themselves relegated to slave-like existences in segregated barracks, separated from kith and kin and dependent upon the State for every crust of bread.

Communes are being used to forge a link between the cities and the countryside, grouping the populace into units comprising up to 20,000 families. The families have been split up, in many cases their homes razed, the men and women assigned to living in barracks, being fed in communal mess halls, while their children are being reared by the State.

The Chinese say that this has been done in order to squeeze the greatest possible amount of productive potentiality from the people in order to bring to realization China's "great leap forward" into the industrialization of the modern world.

The news of the communes was obviously distasteful to Khrushchev and his initial reaction was a sour one. He declared that China's move to mobilize the country into these militaristic communes was "reactionary."

His position was that the communes were "reactionary" because they failed to take into account the effects of incentive to stimulate production. When it was pointed out to him that the use of incentives was a capitalistic device, he replied that "I don't care what you call it, incentives are what get the people to work harder."

Communism—and Khrushchev—are therefore faced with the problem of reconciling the belief in incentives with Mao Tse-tung's declaration that the people's communes "are to remain the basic units of the future Communist society," and that they are "in line with the ideals of the Utopian socialists down to the founders of Marxism-Leninism."

What we now have, therefore, boils down to a great debate between the two poles of the Moscow-Peking axis over which is the optimum method of exploiting the worker. Even though Khrushchev may profess not to like the idea of the communes, it is undeniable that the labor policies of both countries are based on the same thing, and that is control over the individual in the interests of the State.

For the time being it is impossible for Khrushchev to order the same sweeping changes that have taken place in China. However, it is equally clear that he cannot maintain a status quo and must necessarily take some step which would tend to narrow the gap.

There are signs that the Kremlin has been giving this matter some serious thought and that greater social pressures are in the offing for those who live under its rule.

Czechoslovakia is one place where the glimmering of a new policy may be perceived. Czechoslovakia's agricultural production has remained seriously deficient and is today not even producing more than before the war. Even the 12 per cent increase that was planned for 1958 failed to materialize and production did not increase over that of 1957.

As a first step towards improving the situation it has been decided to step up the mechanization of the farms considerably and to reorganize the tractor stations. However, there is a very good chance that this will not be enough and that the regime will be forced into a thorough-going reorganization of the farm collectives.

Similar moves have been undertaken in Bulgaria where mergers in the last three months have reduced the number of collectives by more than three-fourths.

There have been a number of indications in Czechoslovakia that the collectives there may well be merged into larger units in order to assure increased production. It is still too early to judge whether the regime will finally end up by adopting the Chinese system, but the increase in the size of the collectives looks like a preliminary step in that direction.

In Russia itself there is the realization that some means must be found to increase production if the USSR is to fulfill its dream of out-producing the US. Moscow has, therefore, invented a new device called "Brigades of Communist Labor," which are, according to the plan, destined to become the "cells of the future Communist society."

The Labor Brigades were first introduced in November following Khrushchev's announcement of his Seven-Year Plan. The work teams were originally pledged to increase their pace of work, improve their personal conduct and organize their leisure. However, later in the month the central Party apparatus, acting chiefly through the Komsomol, began to regularize the movement. It has been compared to the "Saturday workers" movement of early revolutionary days. Approved by Lenin, it was introduced to work against bourgeois egoism and customs and to discourage laziness and lack of discipline.

In the past there have been any number of devices designed to increase the productivity of the worker. But these Brigades are not merely concerned with work. The program states quite plainly that their main objective is the person and the personality of the individual. It is manifestly designed to make him more responsive to the dictates of social responsibility under Communism.

All this denotes a heightened interest of the regime in the thought processes of the individual, which will ultimately develop into a system whereby the State will seek to control his every act as an individual, quite apart from his work.

The program of the Brigades is composed of five main points far-reaching in effect. First, the members of a Brigade must undertake to "work and live" as Communists and to subscribe to the following program: (1) to look on labor not only as a means of existence, but as a physical and spiritual necessity; (2) to negate the ego and to work for the best interests of the state and community; (3) to study hard to increase working skills, general education and political thinking; (4) to break with the "remnants of the past," and (5) to recruit members for new Brigades.

At first glance it might seem like a far cry from the Brigades to the Chinese communes, but reflection will show that what the Brigades aim to do will perforce create in time a state of mind among the people which would be more closely attuned to the principle of the communes than it is at present. From there to acceptance is but a short step.